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Resources mobilization and enabling environment for poverty eradication in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

Statement submitted by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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"Together, knowing that we are all people, we can all strengthen humanity by respecting each other." These are the words of a young people who was living on a shipwreck remains in Dar-es-Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania.

The challenges faced in the United Republic of Tanzania and in other Least Developed Countries are formidable, as has been highlighted throughout the preparatory meetings for this High-Level Segment. As the international community continues trying to harness financial resources for poverty eradication, these young people and others like them want to offer their human resources to help change the social exclusion that can propagate poverty from one generation to another.

Through their life experiences, their daily suffering, their perennial exclusion from the development of their community, they challenge us to adopt innovative approaches to mobilizing resources and shaping an enabling environment. What is their role in these processes? Their full participation in this process is essential for eradicating poverty.

People living in poverty may lack job qualifications or literacy skills but are able to apply their life experience, not just to change their own situation, but also to help shape a future vision of humanity.

The United Republic of Tanzania is the biggest East African country of about thirty-three million of inhabitants, where eighty percent live in villages. Around 3 million people live in the capital, Dar-Es-Salaam, with half of them living in poverty.

When young people arrive in Dar-Es-Salaam, they come to stay, but they do not find what they are looking for. Most of them will find themselves living on the beach and looking for work at the fish market, because this is their only hope for survival. Most of them once benefited from programs organized by NGOs and official agencies but they are now considered too old. How can the relationship between young people living in extreme poverty and society change ?

The International Movement ATD Fourth World is a non-governmental organization that engages individuals and institutions in support of the efforts of the very poor to free themselves from extreme poverty, founded by F[r] Joseph Wresinski in 1957 in Noisy-Le-Grand. Today, ATD Fourth World's Volunteer Corps runs projects in 30 countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas. It has correspondents in more than 100 countries through the "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World," a network for sharing experiences about fighting poverty. ATD Fourth World is not affiliated with any political party or religion.

Nick Tweehyssen and Andrew Hayes, members of the Fourth World Volunteer Corps, share their experience of work with the youths living on the beach at the fish market place in Dar-Es-Salaam, in the United Republic of Tanzania:

"Since 2000, our presence here has been summed up in two questions:

"How can we learn from the people who have a strong commitment to those who suffer from living in poverty? How can we understand the lives of people living in poverty?"

"We traveled extensively throughout the country to renew ties with people who were already in contact with us. These people led us to other contacts and taught us the meaning of being committed to fighting for the poorest here in the United Republic of Tanzania.

"We noticed that many people we meet consider themselves poor but at the same time are able to overcome the difficulties of their lives by relying on strong family ties, strong relations within their community or because of their friends. the United Republic of Tanzania is a place where people support each other.

"One member of ATD Fourth World told us, 'Before, when I went to the fish market, I went to look for fish but now I have learned to look at the market in a different way. Now I have learned to pay attention to the person who is selling or cleaning the fish.'"

Reaching The Poorest

Through regular visits with the poor youths living in the streets of Dar-Es-Salaam, a Fourth World volunteer discovered a group of families whose existence was unknown by the neighboring communities and institutions. They live in beached ships that are earmarked to be sold as scrap. Access to the ships is possible only at low tide. There are many people squatting in these shipwrecks. Many children have been excluded from the overcrowded drop-in centers for children living in the street because, being past the age of 12, they no longer qualify for help. These young adolescents do not get any support from the community centers and programs run by the government. They feel abandoned.

In the past, at the old fish market, many of the poor young adolescents living in the street could earn a bit of money doing odd jobs, such as cleaning fish, helping the fish sellers, collecting firewood. These jobs provided them with enough money for a small meal or a piece of fruit.

Recently, local government, with financial support from the government of an industrialized country replaced the fish market with a modern structure that will house the vendors and some local services. However, due to a lack of consultation in the planning phase and the resulting misunderstanding of the informal aspects of the present fish market, many of these poor youths, as well as other very poor market workers, found themselves excluded from the market reforms and lost their livelihoods. One respected vendor, a member of the Fourth World Movement, found himself faced with the difficult responsibility of deciding which vendors would be invited to relocate to the new market, and which would not. He was worried when he learned of the effects his decisions, taken on behalf of the developers, would have on those excluded from the new market. Knowing that only some of the original vendors would be allowed within the new market structure, he exercised diplomacy and creativity in trying to keep the greatest number of vendors employed. He tried to negotiate with competitors so that they could collaborate or share booths, and created a "waiting list" of vendors to be considered for booths

should new space become available at a later date. Despite these efforts, it was inevitable that some of the market vendors would be excluded from the new market.

In the planning and implementation of sustainable development programs, policies and projects, the poorest must be included from the outset. If taken into account, their life experience and knowledge can contribute to a successful partnership between developers and the community and can promote unity in the community towards a common goal that can benefit the whole of the community including the poorest. In reality the poorest are all too often completely ignored.

Mobilization and Commitment of Youths Living in Poverty

These youths are often blamed for their lack of participation and responsibility within their community which in turn leads them to be marginalized and excluded.

Regular visits and meetings organized at the fish market enable them to talk about the hardships of their lives and to offer each other support. Bringing them together builds strong commitment to each others' wellbeing.

Often those who have found work during the day will buy food for those who have none; they visit friends who are in prison or in the hospital. They show a great deal of camaraderie and solidarity to one another.

Through building a relationship of trust, Fourth World Volunteer Corps members have succeeded in helping these youths realize that they are able to contribute to the development of their community and their country.

ATD Fourth World organized a one-week workcamp, with some of the youths, in Moshi in a residential school for blind children. Adults and youths repaired beds and desks and painted the walls for the community around the school. The young people felt proud to have contributed to the future of the blind children and realized that they had something to offer the community. Involvement in such a project brought poor youths together from various neighborhoods, encouraging them to support one another.

Paul's Testimony

Paul, 22 years old, is one the youths met at the fish market. He finds it very hard to imagine a future for himself, but the difficult conditions in which he lives do not prevent him from being a spokesperson for others.

He relates: "With a number of friends I was sleeping behind an enclosure on a piece of ground in the city center. I had been chased away from somewhere else and thought I could sleep there without too many problems. But all of a sudden the police came and I found myself in prison.

They accused us all of vagrancy. We young people must speak loud and clear. We must come together like a family to ensure the rights and responsibilities of each and everyone.

"Nobody chooses the place where they are born. It could be a place where life is hard or a place where life is more comfortable. For this reason we must all respect each other, because we are all human beings. Millions of children live in very difficult conditions, some because they have lost their parents and some because of the poverty of their family. One of the consequences of this difficult life is that some of these children, at a very young age, will leave their town or village and start living a difficult life on the streets of big towns or cities like Dar-Es-Salaam.

See also: "Partnerships with People Living in Persistent Poverty, the Missing Partners in Sustainable Development," submitted by ATD Fourth World to the World Forum on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002.

"They will look for a little work during the day and maybe they will earn just enough for a plate of rice. Living this way is dangerous not just for their health, but because they also risk being accused of stealing. Today we are seen as vagabonds and vagrants, and we risk being thrown into prison at any time; but we were born in this country and we want to do everything so as to earn a living legally. We wash cars, clean fish, even crush stones to make gravel. But many of us never went to school, so we don't know the rights that would protect us. We need our leaders to support us so that we can live freely. Time spent in prison is time that is lost. If we are put in prison, and nobody knows where we are, it is like we don't exist anymore. It is almost as if we don't have an identity.

"Everything starts with the family, where one should be able to live a decent life with good relationships between its members. Good relationships with society will lead to good conduct. Parents can give moral training to their children so that they can live these good relations with society. We all know what we want for those that we are close to. Listening to and showing respect to those around us can lift people out of their isolation. One can share ideas regardless of where one comes from. We can overcome poverty when we live like a family. In this way, the poor will not be ashamed of their situation but instead will feel supported and regain hope for the future."

Drawing on what he has been through in his years on the streets, Paul calls on others to think about the meaning of personal identity. Examples such as these reveal some facets of the social, and often physical, isolation that is characteristic of extreme poverty all over the world.

Creating Dialogue and Encouraging Mutual Understanding

Creating dialogue and partnerships with the poorest in achieving sustainable development is imperative for the following reasons:

Stakeholders living in poverty possess knowledge that is crucial for sustainable development programs.

Dialogue with them encourages mutual understanding and dispels misconceptions which may lead to conflicting goals and initiatives between the different stakeholders.

It brings the voice of the poorest, individuals, families and communities to the decision-making table. The very poor themselves will thereby be encouraged to contribute to the sustainability of development efforts.

Recommendations:

The Economic and Social Council can play an important role in recognizing and promoting the active participation of people living in extreme poverty in the development of their community and country.

The process of accountability for poverty reduction strategies and service delivery in the Least Developed Countries rarely reaches the poorest stakeholders in a given community. Actively seeking the participation of these stakeholders and amplifying their voice from the outset can help to ensure that development efforts do not exclude the people they are intended to help.

Mobilizing resources and enabling environment must support more participatory approaches to poverty eradication. This must help to generate a more comprehensive and effective understanding of the causes of extreme poverty and the condition that prevent people from getting out of the poverty cycle.

NGO involvement is essential for the successful implementation of the above recommendations. They can be a vital bridge between governments and international institutions and people living in extreme poverty. More consultation, support and resources should be provided to them accordingly to enable them to fulfill this role.